

FARMERS' INTERESTS.

Local Legislation Affecting the Well Being of the Agricultural Communities.

The Rapid Growth of Co-operative Work in Handling and Marketing Provincial Crops.

No branch or class of legislation has received more careful attention at the hands of the present administration than that affecting and designed to assist in the development of the agricultural interests of the province; and the brief outline which it is here possible to give of the scope and provisions of the various statutes can hardly be expected to convey to the reader more than a general idea of the amount of practical assistance afforded to the agricultural interests by the legislation now under consideration.

The importance of associations having for their object the uniting of the agricultural classes, with power to promote and protect the mutual interests of the members, and to procure and disseminate information respecting modern methods, inventions and appliances is now universally recognized, and has at the hands of the government received careful attention. We will, therefore, in the first instance, deal with the legislation affecting these associations. The original act was the Agricultural Associations act which was consolidated as chapter 4 of the Consolidated Acts, 1893, and is now chapter 12 of the Revised Statutes, 1897. In 1890 a further statute was passed at the instance of the government which while extending the objects and powers of the original class of associations, made provision to include in addition to, or rather to combine with agriculture and its interests, horticultural

and cognate interests as well as providing for the creation of a Provincial Horticultural and Fruitgrowers' association, having for its object the general advancement of the interests of the fruit growers throughout the province. With the view of empowering the provincial association to practically benefit provincial farmers and fruitgrowers, it is empowered to hold meetings and exhibitions, and to distribute prizes, diplomas and awards of merit; to obtain seeds, plants and trees for distribution for the purpose of improving existing stock and to procure the introduction and cultivation of new kinds and varieties; to adopt a systematic method of procuring and distributing practical information respecting the objects for which it is formed and generally to exercise all necessary corporate powers for the benefit of the agricultural classes throughout the province.

In addition to this provincial board the old provisions respecting local associations are kept in force, being, however, improved in many respects, and the associations given all necessary powers to enable them to be of practical assistance to the members and the farming classes generally.

THE FRUITGROWERS' ASSOCIATION.

Under the powers conferred by these acts a number of agricultural associations have been formed throughout the

country for the purpose of holding exhibitions and for mutual improvement, to which the government has extended liberal aid. Among the most important of these may be mentioned the British Columbia Fruitgrowers' Association, organized, under a special act, in 1889. This association has been very successful from the outset, and at the time it was formed created a great deal of interest in the subject of fruit growing, and gave an impetus to that industry which has been developed on the lines then laid down. This association was started when there was practically no agricultural department to perform similar work, and in addition to bringing the farmers together and uniting them for the purpose of carrying out common objects and improving the industry, it was instrumental in disseminating very much valuable information, both in regard to the agricultural capabilities of the province and as to the best methods to be employed. It also did much towards placing within the reach of its members information respecting the prevention and extermination of insect pests, which began to make their appearance early in the history of the association. Latterly the work of the Fruitgrowers' association has been largely taken up by the officers of the department of agriculture and the board of horticulture, which have carried on the work then commenced with greater system and completeness. One special feature of the work of the association during the past two or three years has been the encouragement of co-operation on practical lines for the purpose of finding new markets and of affording better facilities and better methods of marketing. Under its agents several fruit exchanges have been established and the one on the Fraser valley has done an important work in this respect, and its operations are rapidly extending. It has succeeded in finding a market for British Columbia fruit in the Northwest markets, in obtaining concessions with regard to freight rates, and obtaining co-operations among its members for the purpose of disposing of their produce. This will undoubtedly develop into an important agency, and its effects are already quite appreciable. It is possible that in the near future the Fruitgrowers associations may become merged into the Central Farmers' Institute, the scope of which includes all that is contemplated and performed by the Fruitgrowers' association. It, however, deserves, special recognition on account of the pioneer work performed under its auspices.

The Flockmasters' association and the Dairymen's association are other insti-

tutions which have come into life within the period referred to: Their sphere of operation is not so extensive as that of the Fruitgrowers' association, but they have done very useful work. It is possible that these, too, may become merged into the Farmers' Institute, but that depends of course upon the disposition of the members themselves.

PROVINCIAL BOARD OF HORTICULTURE.

In order to further assist the provincial fruitgrowers, and to render them protection as well as assistance, there was passed in 1894 a statute which, with its amending acts, is consolidated as chapter 94 of the Revised Statutes, 1897, and is known as the "Horticultural Board act." This act as amended in 1897 divides the province into three districts as follows: (1) The first district comprising Vancouver Island and the islands adjacent thereto; (2) the second district comprising the electoral districts of New Westminster city, Vancouver city, Westminster, Cassiar, and that portion of Comox lying on the mainland of British Columbia; (3) the third district comprising the remainder of British Columbia not included in the two other districts.

The act creates a provincial board of horticulture composed of the minister of agriculture and the deputy minister of agriculture as ex-officio members, together with three members to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, one from each of the above districts; the appointed members must reside in the district for which they are appointed; they are selected with reference to their practical knowledge of and abilities in the classes of objects to be dealt with by the board, and hold office for a term of four years. The objects of the board are, first, to prevent the spread of contagious diseases in orchards and gardens and among fruit and fruit trees, and for the prevention and extirpation of fruit pests and the diseases of fruit and fruit trees and orchard and nursery stock, and, second, to prevent the importation of any diseased fruit, trees, plants, or nursery stock. To effect these purposes the board is empowered to make all necessary regulations and to take all necessary steps for the purpose of preventing the spread of contagious diseases in orchards and gardens and among fruit and fruit trees, and for the prevention, treatment, cure and extirpation of fruit pests and the diseases of fruit and fruit trees, for the disinfection of grafts, scions, or orchard debris, empty fruit boxes or packages, and other suspected material or transportable articles dangerous to orchards, fruit and fruit trees, and for the inspection and

disinfection or destruction thereof, or of non-fruit-bearing trees or shrubs which may carry contagion, and also for requiring all cases of contagious diseases or fruit pests to be reported to the board. These regulations are circulated in printed form by the board among the fruit growers and fruit dealers of the province.

PRACTICAL RESULTS.

Regarding the practical working of the board of horticulture a great deal might be said. However, it is unnecessary here to deal with it in a comprehensive way. The work of the board, although not so fully appreciated and so well known as it should be has been most beneficial. The members have devoted a great deal of time and put forth very earnest efforts towards accomplishing objects sought by the legislation creating the board. Its work has been three-fold in character: (1) As to the inspection of fruit and nursery stock in order to prevent the importation of diseased fruit or nursery scions; (2) in framing and enforcing regulations for the conduct of the fruit industry in respect to the prevention and extermination of fruit pests concerning which the province was at one time seriously threatened, and it has only been by constant vigilance on the part of the officials that comparative immunity has been obtained; and (3) in respect to educating the farmers and fruit growers of the province as to the science and best methods of horticulture in every department, including planting, cultivation, pruning, harvesting and marketing. The members of the board, who are all zealous and efficient men, have travelled over the portions of the province in which fruit growing is carried on, and visited individual orchards, have instructed farmers, delivered addresses and in many other ways have promoted interest and produced good results generally.

It may be stated here that the province of British Columbia has been the pioneer in Canada in respect to this important work, and in no other province has such systematic efforts been put in force, and had a similar system been carried out in Eastern Canada, it would not have been necessary to-day to have enacted the stringent legislation that has recently been placed upon the statute books of the Dominion, preventing the importation of foreign nursery stock which is now a serious matter to many of our farmers, owing to contracts which have been entered into, and to the difficulty which is experienced in obtaining a sufficient supply of the right varieties for orchards from the South where the conditions are similar. The regulations of the department have been carried out

judiciously as well as effectively, and there is absolutely nothing to be complained of in regard to the manner in which the duties of the board have been performed.

DAIRYING.

Closely allied to the agricultural and fruit-growing interests, and fully equal to them in point of importance, is the subject of dairying and the providing of means to render possible the consolidation of the individual resources of a district so as to insure a greatly increased and more marketable product with a corresponding of profits to the individual farmer. To effect this purpose several acts have been passed, the first being the Dairymen's Association Act, 1894, the second the Dairymen's Association Act, 1895, and the third the Creameries Act, 1896. These acts have been consolidated in the above order as Part I., Part II., and Part III. of the revised Dairy Associations Act, chapter 18 of the Revised Statutes, 1897.

Part I. provides for the incorporation of a Provincial Dairymen's Association, which is given a charter covering the province, with power to hold exhibitions for the display of dairying products for which prizes, diplomas, or other awards of merit may be given; to purchase such implements of dairying as may be deemed advisable for the purpose of experimenting and for the education of the public in the art and science of practical dairying; to purchase, hold and dispose of lands, erect buildings, and obtain all necessary equipments therefor for the purpose of experiment or instruction in the methods of dairying, or holding exhibitions, or the establishment of a collection of products, articles and implements pertaining to the study of dairying; to organize, establish, and conduct a bureau for the collection and dissemination of information bearing on the science of dairying and a department for the promotion of that science.

Part II. provides for the formation of local dairying associations for the objects following:

(a) The manufacturing of cheese and butter;

(b) The keeping of swine and the manufacture and sale of the various products resulting therefrom; and

(c) The dealing in swine and cattle foods for the purpose of supplying such foods to the patrons of such association. Any associations under the original act as to include all objects authorized by are empowered to extend their objects so the revised act. These local associations are given full power to carry out their objects of incorporation.

Part III. deals with the establishment of co-operative creameries and empowers

the Lieutenant-Governor in Council to lend out of the public moneys of the province to each dairy association incorporated for the purpose of carrying on a creamery upon the co-operative system, (which is defined as being a system which secures to all members of the association a share in the profits thereto in proportion to the better fat in the milk supplied by them after payment of a dividend upon the capital stock not exceeding 6 per cent. per annum) a sum not exceeding \$2,000 to each association. Every loan made under this part of the act is subject to a low rate of interest, and is repayable in three instalments at 2 3 and 4 years, and in order to obtain such loan the association must prove its compliance with certain requirements which are:

- (1) That the district within which it is proposed to erect or operate a creamery is competent and fitted for its support, and that there is a reasonable prospect of the same being a financial success;
- (2) That contracts contingent upon the operation of the creamery have been entered into for the supply thereto of the milk of not less than 300 cows, or that such supply is otherwise sufficiently guaranteed or secured;
- (3) That the location of the creamery is such as to prevent encroachment upon the limits of an established creamery, while allowing a radius to the proposed institution of at least six miles;
- (4) That the subscribed capital of the company or association is sufficient, if fully paid up, to enable the company or association to acquire a site and to erect and thoroughly equip an efficient creamery of a capacity to use the milk of not less than 300 cows;
- (5) That the lands of the creamery building and the nature and cost of the proposed plant and equipment be submitted to the government for approval.

Regarding the several associations the leading features of which have been outlined, all the details necessary for their effective operation may be found in the several acts referred to. Just here it is pertinent to remark that in no other province is there such an abundance of legislation providing for co-operative effort on the part of the farmers in the way of production and the methods that may be employed in carrying on the business necessary for success.

Perhaps the most marked advance in agriculture in British Columbia has been made in the direction of the development of the dairy industry, and from a time when the province imported almost all its supply of butter from outside points, the several creameries which are established now are active competitors in the market and secure a large share

of especially the fresh butter trade. The dairy industry is only in its infancy as yet, and with the efforts being put forth by the government and the various association and joint stock concerns, we may safely anticipate that within a few years the dairy industry will be one of the most important branches of agriculture in this province. The province itself is, in respect to nutritious grasses, pure water, and other essentials of dairying, admirably adapted for carrying on the industry, perhaps not on so large a scale as in the North West or in Australia, but sufficient to supply all the wants of the province even with the growing demands which are being made upon the market for local consumption.

FARMERS' INSTITUTES.

In this connection it is desirable to refer at some length to the Farmers' Institutes, an act to establish which was passed in the session of 1897 with amendments in 1898, and the most important of all, the Mutual Credit Associations of the present session.

The establishment of the Farmers' Institutes was provided for in an act passed in the session of 1897. The legislation is based upon that of Ontario and Manitoba, the best features of which are incorporated. There are additional features applicable to the conditions of the province of British Columbia. In addition to this also there is a section providing for the speedy incorporation of associations formed for the purpose of carrying out such objects as dairying, the establishment of fruit exchanges, fruit canning mutual credit associations or other enterprises calling for the co-operation of farmers. Although it was considered at first an act somewhat in advance of the requirements of the province on account of the sparsity of population in rural districts, its provisions have been taken hold of with earnestness and zeal in all parts of the province, and there are now twelve regularly organized institutes which are carrying on their work under the direction of a superintendent, appointed by the government, in a practical and systematic manner. The result of these, as was anticipated has been to cause the farmers to take a more active interest in the problems of agriculture, and to draw them together more closely on the lines of co-operation. A number of well-informed and progressive farmers have been selected to address the meetings of the Farmers' Institutes on live topics, and much information of a valuable character is being imparted in addition to the increased interest which is being manifested and the improved methods which are being adopted as a consequence.

Agitation is the road which leads to reform of all character, social or political, and it has been through the agencies of such institutions established by the government that the agriculturists of the province have been aroused to an appreciation of the possibilities of agriculture in this province and have been led to seriously discuss methods and issues of vital importance to their own interests. It is quite probable that through the agencies of the Farmers' Institutes, co-operation and organization on a comprehensive scale will be effected, and as it is contemplated that the Farmers' Institutes should include a consideration and supervision of all agricultural matters, placing the control directly in the hands of the farmers themselves, it is not improbable that all the subsidiary and auxiliary associations may finally be merged into them.

AGRICULTURAL CREDIT ASSOCIATIONS.

Coincident with the establishment of the Farmers' Institutes came a movement in favor of obtaining cheaper money for the purposes of carrying on ordinary farming operations where it was necessary to borrow. In a young country like British Columbia with the current rate of interest high and the necessities of farmers in the way of development many, it was natural that a measure looking towards the reduction of interest would be forthcoming, as the difference between the rate at which money could be obtained by the government and the ordinary rate paid by farmers on mortgages and loans (the latter being from 8 to 12 per cent.) means in itself a large share of profit, and the money required for paying off interest on mortgages or on loans necessary for temporary purposes the profits of ordinary farm operations are entirely absorbed. The question how this reduction of interest could be best obtained was a serious problem for the government. There were a number of systems considered, including the Land Banks and Agricultural Associations of Europe, and the direct method employed in New Zealand of advancing money to farmers for the purpose of paying off their mortgages, the government accepting first mortgages for security. There were many things to be taken into consideration and many conditions to observe. The government after taking everything into consideration decided to adopt a system which in many respects resembles the agricultural credit associations of Germany and for all practical purposes is the same as the agricultural and village banks of Great Britain, with this difference, that while these associations in

Europe by the combined credit of the members can obtain advances from the banks at a rate of interest corresponding to the government rate in this country, and are independent of government assistance, no such arrangement was possible in British Columbia where in order to obtain by united credit cheap money it was necessary for the government to take the place of the private guarantors in Europe. The system is based solely upon the

PRINCIPLE OF CO-OPERATION,

by which the individuals of the community pool their credit and their assets for the purpose obtaining advances, which are made through the association to individual members and for which the association as a whole becomes responsible, the association being authorized to accept proper security, both real and personal, for repayment. The government thereby does not deal directly with individuals, but with communities of individuals, and through the act, and by rules and regulations to be promulgated under the act, provides for an adequate system of supervision and for the reasonable safety of the operation of the system, which is practically an adaptation of commercial banking to agricultural conditions. The primary object of the legislation is not to pay off mortgages of farmers, although this may be incidentally accomplished to the extent to which the association has power to loan, but for the purposes of development, and affording farmers credit to the extent of the security they can offer for carrying on the ordinary reproductive business of farming, whether it be clearing, draining, buying stock, harvesting their crops, building, or what not, so long as the objects are legitimate, the methods intelligent, and the expenditure of the money properly made.

The measure of course must be more or less experimental and in the very nature of things a tentative one, and experience in actual operation may suggest many changes and amendments to adapt it to the requirements of the province. The success of the system depends to a large extent upon the honesty and industry of farmers themselves, and upon the efficient administration of the details.

The inauguration of agricultural credit associations has been hailed by many with satisfaction as indicating a desire on the part of the government to meet the needs of the agricultural community in a practical way, and as the introduction of a progressive policy of agricultural development which, is as successful as its merits deserve, will mean the revolutionizing of agricultural methods

in this province, and the giving to the industry a status far in advance of what it has ever heretofore had. The system has worked out with great success on the continent of Europe under conditions less favorable and with fewer opportunities than exist in British Columbia. If successful, too, it will set an example for the whole Dominion of Canada and the continent of America and will solve many of the more serious problems which at the present time confront the farmer, who from the fierce competition waged by the cheap labor of foreign countries has had for a number of years past but a small margin to reward his necessarily laborious efforts.

AID IN OTHER WAYS.

Reference in the foregoing has only been incidentally made to the expenditure incurred by the government from year to year for agricultural purposes, which in all directions, directly and indirectly, has in recent years aggregated 25 or 30 thousand dollars a year, nor has reference been made to the large sums loaned to the farmers of the Fraser Valley in order to assist them in recovering from the disastrous effects of the flooding of the Fraser river in 1894. There is also to consider the very large sums that have been expended and are being expended by the government in connection with the dyking enterprises of the Fraser River Valley for purpose of reclamation and protection of the rich delta lands of the district affected by overflow, the result of which is that about 100,000 acres of the best land of British Columbia will be made available for cultivation in the highest degree, and will render these lands capable of producing a vast amount of wealth in the years to come.

In view of all that has been stated in the foregoing, which merely presents an outline of the policy of agricultural development pursued by the government it cannot be reasonably maintained by the most captious critic that the government has not done all in its power to advance and promote the interests of the farming community.

THE AGRICULTURAL DEPT.

It has also instituted by its agricultural department a bureau of intelligence which has from time to time issued most valuable information not only for the benefit of the farmers in the various districts themselves but for the information of intending settlers. It was for a long time a standing mark against the province that it was necessary to import so large a share of the ordinary necessities of life which could be produced in the province itself, and

that fact has excited much comment both within and outside the province.

By the policy of directing attention to our agricultural resources in a practical way and affording facilities for development, it will not be longer competent for critics to point the finger of scorn at the lack of production in British Columbia, but on the other hand, from being an importing population we will soon take rank as a population capable of exporting its varied products to other provinces and other countries besides adequately supplying the ever increasing demands of home consumption.

AN AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

It is not, however, the intention of the government to stop here, but to extend its operations to new fields and in other directions. The hon. the Premier in his budget speech as Minister of Finance, indicated the policy of the government in respect to other important matters which were having the attention of the government. He referred to the problems of irrigation by which the dry belts of the interior might be made capable of much greater results, and to the subject of cold storage. He pointed out that by establishing adequate cold storage facilities at some convenient point in the interior that great advantages would ensue to the farmers there where cattle raising was a predominant industry. If farmers could sell their cattle in the fall of the year when in good condition, or kill and store the beef so as to be available to supply the coast markets regularly a great saving would be directly effected to the farmers, besides the many other advantages and benefits that would indirectly accrue. Pursuant to what was an announcement of the government's policy provision was made in the supplementary estimates for the appointment of a commission which will have for its object a careful enquiry into the subject of irrigation, cold storage, the mortgage tax and financial difficulties of the farmers and other matters affecting their interests not yet dealt with by the government. An exhaustive report on these subjects may no doubt be anticipated, and undoubtedly it will have the consideration of the government with a view to further legislative enactment.

The subject of the mortgage tax is one which has been prominently before the public for several years, and has had the serious consideration of the government with a view to avoiding the incidence of taxation falling upon the mortgagors as it does at present in many instances. This, however, is surrounded with many difficulties. It may be stated here that mortgages are taxed by every known government and a similar

difficulty has arisen elsewhere as to the incidence of taxation. The problem has nowhere yet been satisfactorily settled, but the government hopes to see its way clear to practical solution. In this connection it may be stated that the attitude of the government with respect to the mortgage tax was well presented in a letter written by the hon. the President of the Executive Council to his constituents, an extract from which is here given:

"(1) Repeal the Mortgage Tax.

"To the first question I can only say that I, as well as the rest of the government and the government supporters, are anxious to have this mis-called mortgage tax repealed, but repealed in such a way as to meet the wishes of the mortgagors, viz.: to lift the burden of the tax from their shoulders. No solution of this matter after various meetings has been arrived at, and the difficulties are of such a nature that the government has placed upon the supplementary estimates a sum of \$1,000 for a commission to report on financial difficulties of agriculturists, irrigation, etc.,

which will include the mortgage tax (so-called).

"I hope that this commission will, after calling evidence and mature consideration, be able to suggest a solution of what in my view is a most intricate problem."

LITERATURE FOR FARMERS.

As further evidence of the desire of the government to benefit the agriculturist, a system of circulating libraries has been provided for, whereby rural or other communities may be supplied with suitable literature. This will include standard works of interest to the younger people, both boys and girls, of history, travel, and biography; and of the latest and best books in agriculture. These will be passed on from time to time, so that in time every community will have the benefit of all the volumes purchased or available for this purpose. As the great majority of the books so circulated, especially those of particular interest and value to farmers, would otherwise not be available, great benefits should accrue from the establishment of such a system.